

**The Fox Sisters:  
Talking to the Dead or Tricking the Alive?**

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## **Initial Considerations**

Historians make the following distinction between religions: those that have arisen in the darkness of history and those that have emerged in the light of history. The first are those that appeared at the time when records and documentation were very precarious, a period in which almost the entire population was illiterate, or the local language had no writing, so written documentation was a rarity or, in almost all cases did not exist. Many of these religions were first preserved in the memory of the first followers, then transmitted only orally, and later transcribed into the written form. Or those who are known only through the version of their followers, there being no or surviving record of authors outside that tradition, with this we only know these religions through the eyes of their followers.

In contrast, the religions that emerged in the light of history are the most recent, whose appearance occurred at a time when registration capacity was high, so documentation is abundant. When more recent, more abundant the amount of records. For they came at a time when graphic printing, journalism, notary, photography, filmmaking, documentary, etc., existed and history was already recognized as an important tool in understanding culture. So, these recent religions have been surrounded by abundant records and abundant documents, which allow us to know them from different perspectives, namely, their supporters, their opponents, the press and the neutral authors, hence the possibility of a broader idea of its emergence and its development.

This last case is what we found in the emergence of the Modern Spiritist Movement, through the exploits carried out by the Fox sisters in the nineteenth century that is, in a small hamlet in the interior of New York State, at the place called Hydesville, USA. Because they have become a national sensation, with the occurrence of the then famous sounds of rappings of the spirits for communication with the living, the number of publications of testimonies, of news and interviews in newspapers, of reports and commentaries in books are abundant, most of which are preserved. The number of publications at the time and in the following decades was so numerous that in later years it became an information war between sympathizers and opponents of the Spiritist movement through newspapers, pamphlets and books, as we shall see further up.

This is one of hundreds of examples of how religions do not arise and do not develop, nor did they emerge and develop in the distant past, with only one version of events. For in the period when records were scarce or poorly preserved, the same controversies and the same information warfare also occurred, but orally. Therefore, when the versions of the opponents were not recorded, or were not preserved, or even destroyed by the mainstream, the idea that is perpetuated is that everything in that tradition is a sea of roses, an occurrence that we perceive in the history of today's great religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

So, when we read this subject through only one version, for example, from the perspective of spiritist authors or movement sympathizers

(Capron, 1850, Owen, 1865, Underhill, 1885, Doyle, 1926 and Buckland, 2005) and from the perspective of the critics of the Spiritist movement (Page, 1853, Davenport, 1897, Mann, 1919, Houdini, 2011 and Podmore, 2011), it seems that the story is simple and very well resolved. However, on the contrary, when we search from the two versions, that is, the pros and the cons, what we find is a story impregnated with reports and interpretations according to the self-interest of each one that relates it, thus forming a controversial and inconclusive picture. For example, what one side emphasizes, the other omits, what one side omits the other emphasizes. The testimonies, the evidence and the arguments that are important to one side are insignificant and despised by the other side.

Therefore, the spiritist reader, in reading this study, will be surprised at the way in which it is written, as well as the sources from which the material was extracted, since it was not prepared solely from the perspective of the spiritist authors. Fox's sisters, from the point of view of those who believed in their exploits, but, as we shall see, not everyone at that time believed, nor do all scholars today believe that those rappings used to communicate with the living, could be phenomena of supernatural origin.

## **The Origin of Modern Spiritism**

Spiritism found soil fertile for its germination in Brazil. According to statistics, half the followers of this movement in the world are in this South American country. Although it has a very old origin

(Doyle, 1926 and Podmore, 2011: vol. I, 03-178), the most common is Brazilian authors and historians attributing the emergence of Modern Spiritism to the publication of the book *Le Livre des Esprits* (Book of Spirits) by Allan Kardec (pseudonym of Hippolyte Léon Dénizard Rivail, 1804-1869), in 1857, in the city of Paris, France, while the episodes starring the Fox sisters in the United States, only a quick mention (Lang, 2008: 173-4). However, the story is not so for writers and English-speaking historians. For these, Modern Spiritism emerged with the phenomena that surrounded the Fox sisters and has precise date, March 31, 1848, and determined place, the small hamlet of Hydesville, near the village of Arcadia, Wayne County, in the state of New York, USA (see: Capron, 1855: 33-131, Doyle, 1926: 56-119, Chapin 2004: 31-53, Weisberg, 2004: passim, Buckland 2005: 148-53, Sawin 2008: 113; : 01-16 and Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 179s). For these authors, the Fox sisters not only marked the beginning of the Modern Spiritist Movement, but also coined, with the management of their older sister Ann Leah Fox Underhill, some of the ways and arrangements of communication with the spirits that later would become patterns in the form of the spiritists gather, especially the well-known séance. And the few Spiritist authors who recognize the importance of the Fox sisters in the history of Spiritism attribute credibility to the phenomena that occurred in their presence, ignoring the tumultuous controversy that surrounded and still surround the veracity or falsity of these events. For it is an inconclusive story

marked by revelations, suspicions, testimony, delusions of credulity, sensationalism of the press, accusations of fraud, deformity of reports, commercial exploitation, rumors, omissions of occurrences, confessions (forced or spontaneous), recatations (forced or spontaneous) and by disagreements.

### **The First Occurrences in Hydesville**

Before the Fox family became a national attraction in the US, it was just like the many other North American families struggling to survive in the early 1800's. Father John D. Fox was the son of a blacksmith and married Margaret Smith (later Margaret Smith Fox). The couple initially tried to live in New York City and then in the far west of New York state near the border with Canada. Between the years 1820 and 1830, they had four children: Ann Leah, Mary, Elizabeth and David, before John, a compulsive alcoholic, left the family in the 1820s. Then, in the early 1830s, John returned as a restored man and converted to the Methodist Church. Margaret accepted him and they had two other daughters: first Margaret (1833-1893 - also known as Margaretta or Maggie) and the younger Catherine (1837-1892 - known as Kate or Katie), the famous protagonists of the mysterious events that would make them later in national attraction. During these years, the family wandered here and there to settle in Hydesville, a small cluster of houses near the village of Arcadia, Wayne County, in the far west of New York state, north of the USA, in December 1947, with only the two youngest daughters, Maggie and Kate, and eventually with granddaughter

Elizabeth Fish (Lizzie), daughter of the first marriage of Ann Leah Fox, because the elder daughters were already married and lived in other places.

The intriguing story of the mysterious rappings began on New Year's Eve 1848, when John D. Fox was awakened by the sounds of blows that occurred in different parts of the small house. Once the sounds continued over the next few weeks, he imagined they came from working with a neighbor's hammer, or parties in the surrounding houses, or even rat-like sounds. Mrs. Fox did not accept her husband's hypothesis, for she came from a family that believed in supernatural forces and began to assume that the sounds were from otherworldly forces. As the weeks passed and the sounds continued, Mrs. Fox became more and more distressed. Then the tension reached its climax on the night of March 31, 1848, when the youngest daughters, Margaret (Maggie) and Catherine (Katie), fourteen and eleven years old respectively, decided to play with those beating sounds (rappings). They said to the blows, "Do as I do," then clapped four times, and the blows immediately responded with four pounding sounds. Mrs. Fox was startled by the response, realizing that there was an intelligence behind those thumping sounds, and began asking questions so that the sounds would respond yes or no through a number of strokes. The answers told him that the blows were provoked by the spirit of a man who was murdered and buried in the basement of that house. Then,

even more frightened by those answers, she decided to call the neighbors.

For spiritist believers, the main source of knowledge of witness reports from the earliest occurrences of sounds, accompanied by intelligent responses, is a collection of testimonies, collected by a journalist, E. E. Lewis, and signed by the deponents in April 1848, which includes Mrs. Fox, her husband John Fox and some neighbors, but excludes the younger Fox sisters (Maggie and Katie), perhaps because of their age, or because they did not even imagine that the sounds only happened with their presence, as verified in the following weeks. Soon after, the collection was published in a pamphlet by E. E. Lewis, a lawyer and journalist from a neighboring town (see: Lewis, 2005).

I say the version of the Spiritist believers who supported and still support the supernatural character of these phenomena, for later in 1888 the Fox sisters made a public confession widely publicized in the American newspapers and in a bombastic book published by Reuben Briggs Davenport, confessing that the sounds of rappings were a joke created by them in order to frighten their younger niece Elizabeth (Lizzie), who resided with them at that time, and her superstitious mother, through the clash of apples, hung by a string tied to the stem of the fruit, with the floor of the room, in a way that could be quickly collected, so that no one could discover the trick, which was later developed in the technique of provoking rappings through the toes with the bedding (Davenport, 1897: 89-90), as we shall see in the course of this study.



Mrs. Fox, in her testimony to the journalist E. E. Lewis, about that night of March 31, 1888, reported: "The children, who slept on the other bed in the room, heard the noise and tried to make a similar noise by snapping their fingers. The youngest (12 years old) did this. As soon as she produced the sounds with her fingers, the noise was followed in the bedroom. (...) through the same number of noises the child made. When she stopped, the noise also stopped for a moment. The other daughter (15 years old) then said playfully: 'Now, do it exactly the way I do, count one, two, three, four ..., clapping one hand at the other.' The sounds she made were repeated as before. She did it only once. Then she started to get scared; that is, when I said to the noise: count to ten, and the noise made ten strokes or noises. So I asked the age of my daughters successively, and the noise produced a number of knocking sounds corresponding to the ages of my daughters "(Lewis, 2005: 03-4).

Then Mrs. Fox asked if it was a human creature that was making those sounds. However, there was no answer. She continued, "So I asked if it was a spirit, and if it was, I would respond with two rappings. I heard two sounds as soon as my words were spoken" (idem: 04). Then she wondered whom that spirit was that caused those mysterious sounds. From there she was informed that it was a 31-year-old peddler who was murdered for \$ 500 and then buried in the basement of that house. Then she asked if the blowing sounds would continue if she called the neighbors to testify, and the noise answered yes. Then she asked her husband to call the neighbors. The full content of the testimonials

will not be reproduced here, since these testimonials are extensive and repetitive.

For Margaret Fox Kane (Maggie), E. E. Lewis was not an impartial observer. In her 1888 confession, she revealed the following: "Much of the effect of the knock sounds is to a large extent exaggerated in this testimony that my mother was forced to write. I say she was forced to write it, because the writing of the testimony, if it was not largely dictated by others first, i.e. by men who wanted to reveal the details of the beating sounds and make money from the sale of the pamphlet describing them, was then greatly misrepresented so that it could be used to adjust to the dishonest aims of professional spiritists" (Davenport, 1897: 90-1; see also Chapin: 2004: 37). On the other hand, in this passage from Maggie's account, we can recognize the reason why her confession and that of her sister were never accepted as fully credible and conclusive statements, as well as in many other statements, since when of these confessions; both were already immersed in alcoholism, consequently discredited. Note that the phrase "being used to fit the dishonest goals of professional spiritists" reveals an anachronism with the date of his mother's testimony (mid-April 1848), since it was the beginning of the Spiritist Movement, so it did not exist yet "professional spiritists", so it is difficult to know who she refers to by this expression.

In David Chapin's understanding, at this stage, the production of the knock sounds was already done by the squeezing of the sisters' fingers, rather than the clash of the apple with the floor of the house. For him: "On Friday night, March

31, the girls decided to take the trick further. That night, Mrs. Fox decided to go to bed shortly after sunset, in order to put the sleep into day. Immediately the thump sounds began. The children then imitated the sounds by snapping their fingers, to the horror of Mrs. Fox ... "(Chapin, 2004: 31-2). In the confession of Maggie (Margaret Fox Kane) in 1888, the elder sister who performed the rappings, she confessed how the tricks were performed: "Now this is the reality of how we had, for the first time, the idea of producing (the sounds) with the joints (of the fingers) similar to the sounds that we had made by the clash of the apples with the aid of a cord. After trying with our fingers, we then tried with our feet, and it was not long before we found out that we could produce very loud knock sounds with the action of the joints of the toes when in contact with something that he was a good conductor of sound. My sister Kate was the first to discover that we could make such peculiar sounds with our fingers. We used to practice first with one foot and then with the other, and finally we did it with little effort "(Davenport, 1897: 90 and Chapin, 2004: 32).

Note that Mrs. Fox's account above, as well as those of the neighbors who have witnessed those events, carry the best and most common ingredients of subsequent horror film stories, from the creation of this film genre: haunted house, at night, house newly occupied by new residents, presence of a disembodied spirit of someone who was murdered and then buried in the basement of the house, inability to discover the origin and cause of scary events, residents terrified of those mysterious events, etc. Finally, the Fox sisters were not only the pioneers of the Modern Spiritist

Movement, they also laid the foundations and necessary ingredients for the script of a good horror film. In addition, here we can find one of the reasons why religions have become such a popular culture, namely, the large number of individuals who believe in a well-told story rather than the perception of reality that happens before their eyes.

Despite the impacts on neighbors, not everyone in the area believed that events were a form of communication with a spirit. Hence, because this sensational event took place on March 31, that is, on April 1, the Newark Herald, a newspaper in the area, which did not believe in the supernatural nature of the episodes, remarked that all this was a prank of April 1. Another newspaper in the region, Western Argus, from nearby Lyon, reported the following on April 12: "The whole country is mad with the uproar and hundreds are heading to the place to hear the thumping sounds." And he ended the news with a hint of a sneer: "setting up a hostel in the neighborhood to accommodate those who make that place a retreat place could be a good deal" (Sawin 2008: 113; see also Chapin 2004: 36). Also, on hearing of the forthcoming publication of E. E. Lewis pamphlet, the Newark Herald, accused him of encouraging excitement about the events to increase sales of the pamphlets and then considered him "either an ignorant idiot or a perfect rogue" (Sawin, 2008: 113). The explicit commercial character of the E.E. Lewis pamphlet can be confirmed first in the fact that it is sold and, what is even more promotional, at the end of the pamphlet he offered a reward of \$ 50 for anyone who discovered "if the mysterious phenomena were work of any human being" (Lewis,

2005: 33-4). As we shall see, commercial exploitation followed the activities of the Fox sisters from beginning to end.

Prior to the confessions of Margaret Fox Kane (Maggie) and Catherine Fox Jencken (Katie) in 1888, some speculation about the origin and authorship of knock sounds were suggested. In mid-May 1848, most local papers concluded that the sounds of blows were a joke carried out by Mr. Fox, who, sitting in his trembling bed, could produce the sounds with only a slight movement. The Western Argus newspaper was sure of this evidence, then predicted that the case would soon end and accused Mr. Fox of deceiving deluded spirits (Western Argus, May 17, 1848, Jackson Jr., 1972: 18-20 and Sawin, 2008: 113; see also: Chapin, 2004: 36). Another newspaper in the region, the Rochester Daily American, published on April 22, "The excitement that this incomparable cheating has created to some extent has eased, and people who were a bit skeptical at first are now beginning to approve the idea that they were inevitably deceived". This newspaper also speculated that perhaps the whole thing was a prank of April 1 (Chapin, 2004: 38).

Now what the skeptics did not imagine was the size of the explosion of credulity that this event would unleash, triggering a fever of interest in communicating with the dead in the US and later in other countries, which spawned a proliferation of mediums since then.

### **The Ascent to the Starry Star**

As anticipated by some newspapers at the time, all this excitement might have died out if it had not been for the intromission of Ann Leah Fox Underhill, the eldest of the Fox sisters, twenty years older than the younger sisters, separated from her third marriage, had little contact with his family in Hydesville. She, at the time of the events, resided in Rochester, surviving with piano lessons. Upon learning about the events at her home, through a sheet of evidence from the E. E. Lewis pamphlet, which was shown to her by one of her students, the son of a graphic owner, she ran to find her family in Hydesville, finding their families in a panic. The mistrust of tricks behind the events grew to the point that the family feared the crowd, who crowded around the house demanding explanations. So Leah advised her mother and sisters to withdraw from Hydesville.

For a time, the young sisters lived at Leah's house in Rochester, at which time Leah realized the great commercial potential of these phenomena. Using her cunning, she was busy managing the activities of the younger sisters and hurried to fill what those mysterious phenomena needed to achieve popular credibility, that is, the creation of a religious significance for them. When she learned of the use of the alphabet in Hydesville, to get a response from the spirit, instead of the simple yes or no answer, she immediately resumed this method and explained the importance of the mission in her book: "I asked you, 'Do you want to say something to us'? There was a tremendous knock sound in response. I then began by invoking the alphabet, letter by letter in order, and the first message obtained at Rochester through the spirits

was this: 'Dear friends, you must proclaim these truths to the world. This is the dawn of a new age and you must no longer hide it. When you do your duty, God will protect you and good spirits will watch over you' (Underhill, 1885: 48-9 and Sawin, 2008: 113).

Quite differently, in the 1888 confessions, Maggie and Kate countered that "Leah's promotional efforts were motivated only by her desire for fortune and fame, and that they, as innocent young women, were victims of their money-making cheat" (Sawin, 2008: 113: see more in detail: Davenport, 1897: 102-20). Her interest in money was so strong that she concluded the following in her own book as she left the city of Buffalo after a fortnightly visit: "From a financial point of view, we had never met with equal success" (Underhill, 1885: 196).<sup>1</sup> The Fox sisters raised "more than \$ 100 a day, an impressive sum for a time when the average worker made a dollar a day. They charged a dollar per person for public meetings, which included 90 people a day (3 sessions of 30 people each), and they usually held private meetings charging \$ 5 for each session" (Sawin: 2008: 113 and 113n89; see also: Underhill, 1885: 120).

In Maggie's confession, she revealed that Leah knew from the outset that the phenomena of thumping sounds were tricks: "One of the first things she (Leah) did upon arriving at the house was to

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<sup>1</sup> This book by Leah Fox Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism*, was defined by her sister, Maggie Fox, in her 1888 confession as a "liar book" (Davenport, 1897: 89).

take them to a corner, she and Kate, and make them undress and show the way to produce the mysterious sounds". After knowing how the sounds were produced, she (Leah) tried to make them for herself. "She found it very difficult to produce the same effect, since the joints of her feet were no longer as flexible as in childhood." In addition, that she "never managed to achieve much skill in this method of fraud". For the sound she produced was "a vague sound to be heard, it was easy to perceive (as a fraud)" (Davenport, 1897: 103-4). In addition, Maggie revealed what she suffered when they held sessions together: "I was ashamed and mortified at the awkward way in which she (Leah) made the weak knock sounds, and then they (the audience in the auditorium) looked at me with the physiognomy of suspicion and surprise. It took a lot of my skill and my best tact to keep them from going away thinking it was an imposture" (idem: 104).

Thus, in order to carry out the mission of "proclaiming these truths to the world", Leah Underhill introduced her medium sisters to the influential and prestigious people of Rochester and other towns in the region who became supporters of her project. With this introduction in the important families of Rochester in the coming months, several citizens of the city came to believe that the Fox sisters were able to communicate with the spirits and began to see them as prophets of a new era of relationship between Earth and the Kingdom of Heaven. The first meetings were closed, which attracted little attention from the press, as they were frequented by spiritist believers and chosen guests. In the fall of 1849, so eighteen months after the



onset of rappings, the Fox sisters enjoyed the support of dozens of families. The sessions continued. Some supporters took Kate to Auburn to meet with spiritist believers in that town while Maggie and Leah held a busy schedule in Rochester.

According to Eliab W. Capron, one of the first supporters and responsible for spreading the beginning of the Modern Spiritist Movement, the spirits began to demand that their presences be known all over the world, but the fear of the Fox sisters for notoriety made them resist, in order that the situation did not take that direction. This annoyed the spirits, and consequently, during a séance led by Maggie and Leah, they laconically spelled: "We will bid you farewell now," and the sound of blows was hushed. Days passed and sounds did not return (Capron, 1855: 88-9 and Sawin, 2008: 113). This was the first disagreement between the Fox sisters and their supporters. Based on the confessions, it was obviously not the spirits who said goodbye in the session, but it was Maggie Fox, who was dissatisfied with the risky situation of being overly exposed, because behind it all she feared the tricks would be discovered. The version was put in this way, since Eliab W. Capron was a believer and supporter of the Movement. The dissatisfaction was so evident that the Fox sisters themselves declare immediately "that they were happy to be free from the spirits and consider it a relief" (Capron, 1855: 89 and Sawin, 2008: 113). Ever since they started that marathon, during the eighteen months, the Fox sisters had no more childhood. For they became from children of a family of farmers in the small town of Hydesville, to a

center of attention surrounded by intellectualized adults and sympathetic to the idea of communicating with the dead. In short, they were children who led the lives of adults.

After twelve days of silence at the Fox house, Eliab W. Capron joined George Willets in begging for Leah and Maggie. Unlike the other supporters, Capron was more aggressive in his desire to promote the spirits. He drove Kate to Auburn to get converts. Then, surprisingly, when he entered the Fox house, the spirits interrupted the silence. Through that tedious system of spelling letters through blowing sounds, the spirits, once again, demanded that their existence be taken prominently before the public. The essence of the spirit plan consisted in the following requirement: "rent Corinthian Hall", Rochester's newest and largest auditorium (Sawin, 2008: 113 and Chapin, 2004: 46).

The auditorium was rented and a spacious advertisement was published in the Rochester Daily Advertiser with the following flamboyant and sensational title: "Marvelous Phenomena at Corinthian Hall". The event's schedule consisted of a lecture, a demonstration of rappings and the formation of a five-member committee to investigate the authenticity of the sounds in order to find out if they were tricks. The ticket price was \$ 25 cents (\$ 50 cents for a man accompanied by two women). And at the end of the announcement, a stimulating invitation: "Come and Inquire". On the first night, November 14, 1849, four hundred people attended to hear the talk of Eliab W. Capron. Then there was the sound of the pounding of Maggie alone, for Kate was absent. Finally, the choice of members of the

research committee. Investigations were carried out the next day at an office loaned by a local businessman.

In the first investigation, no tricks were found in the production of sounds. Then, the results were announced that night, the auditorium was not satisfied and another committee was formed. More tests were done the next day and the same results, nothing found. A third committee was formed and no tricks were found in the production of knock sounds. Then, the next night, two citizens of Rochester distributed fireworks to some of the troublemakers who carried them into the auditorium causing a great commotion. When the committee announced the outcome of the third investigation, several men rushed toward the stage to grab Maggie and Leah. Although these events startled Maggie, they were all Leah wanted. Maggie later revealed that Leah had planned this all, knowing that "anything that could generate something like a religious persecution, would promote its cause, bringing more general notoriety and sympathy" (Davenport, 1897: 119). The Leah Underhill's talents for marketing and advertising. The night the auditorium broke out, several men surrounded Maggie and Leah and escorted them to their home, while the police were called to calm the impending tumult (Sawin, 2008: 113). Later Maggie would reveal that Leah calculated the effect these meetings would have and was pleased with the results (Sawin, 2008: 113n30).

A curious example of fraud occurred shortly after these events, when one of her former teachers visited Kate Fox, Mrs. Mary B. Allen, an educator who was curious to know about the "other

world". So, in order to test Kate, the teacher asked Kate to ask her grandmother's spirit how to spell the word "scissors". Using that method of spelling through the knock sounds, before Kate's attentive eyes, the spirit spelled "cisser". There, professor Allen exclaimed in surprise, "Well, this was exactly the way Kate spelled the word" scissors" when she was a student at my school". (Sawin, 2008: 113). Translating, the answer did not come from the mind, but from the mind of Kate Fox. Cases like these are some of the main examples pointed out by those who claim that the messages of the spirits through the mediums are actually projections of the medium's unconscious in the message supposedly received, that is, the message does not come from the spirit, but from the mind of the medium.

Such suspicious facts, however, did not prevent people from flocking to the Fox sisters' sessions, bringing money with them. It was at this time that Leah began to suggest donating a dollar a visitor (Sawin, 2008: 113). According to Leah Underhill, "the first money was received on November 28, 1849" (Underhill, 1885: 103). With increasing popularity, the Fox sisters were taken to the cities of Albany and Troy in April and May 1850 respectively. They were not just a local attraction, they were becoming a regional attraction. Although, with a few exceptions, the press continued to point the Fox sisters as cheaters, but disagreed as to how the knock sounds were played. Some newspapers announced that the sounds were produced by a special electrical condition in the bodies of mediums, and still others accepted the impressions obtained by those who were in Corinthian Hall, that

the sisters hid lead balls at the edges of their skirts or cracked their knees or your toes.

Well, if the two sisters knew that these phenomena were tricks performed by them, then the reader might be curious to know why they did not confess the joke at the outset, which would have avoided that long period of deception. Maggie Fox explained the reason in her 1888 confession: "The more the blowing sounds continued, the more difficult it was to stop. With so many people, family and friends being cheated, confessing the trick became impossible. So we went forward" (Davenport, 1897: 92 and Chapin: 2004: 40).

### **The Fox Sisters in New York**

The more the press reported, even suspecting tricks, the more the curiosity of the population increased. The news began to spread beyond that region and reached major North American cities, including the largest of all, New York. Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, was one of the few journalists in the country who took the rapping case seriously, to the point of sending a reporter to Rochester shortly after the events at Corinthian Hall. Greeley continued to report on the Fox sisters in a neutral manner over the next few months, neither approving nor condemning. Because of these circumstances, Leah decided it was time to take Maggie and Kate to New York City. Taking advantage of her marketable gifts, she gave H. Greeley news privileges, assuring him that she would be the first visitor to the meeting rooms at the Barnum Hotel. The sisters arrived in Manhattan on June 3, 1850,

and just as Leah had expected, H. Greeley was one of the first visitors. In his opening conversation, he suggested to Leah that he raise the price of the ticket to five dollars a person "in order to avoid the presence of the mob," but Leah ignored the suggestion and kept the price of a dollar a head.

During the stay in New York, the Fox sisters held meetings, arranged by H. Greeley, with intellectuals of the letters of that city, which was news in the newspapers. Journalists from major New York newspapers circulating throughout the country, who attended the lectures and demonstrations of thumping sounds, were impressed by the performance of the sisters. The authors evaluate the results differently, while some said that the ratings were favorable to the sisters, others found references in newspapers that the evaluations were not unanimous. For example, on June 8, 1850, the New York Tribune published a two-column article by George Ripley, the literary editor of this newspaper, reporting one of the meetings with the Fox sisters. A week later M P. Willis, editor of the New York Home Journal, published a longer article. None of these articles endorsed the sounds of rappings. They simply reported a mysterious story and let the audience decide. Ripley finished his article "recommending readers to see for themselves; while Willis concluded: "There is no end to speculation on the subject, and we leave it with our readers" (Chapin, 2004: 78).

Despite the divergent opinions of viewers and journalists, the impression that prevailed in New York was that the demonstrations were a success, which served as a lever to propel the Fox sisters to

the star. So it was consolidated, they were now a national attraction. From there, invitations to demonstrations and sessions in other major cities of the USA rained.

### **The Investigations before the Confessions**

Just as the increase in public demonstrations increased the popularity of the Fox sisters, so did the skeptics who offered to do a thorough investigation of the phenomenon. As well as those who ventured to issue a theory to explain the origin of the mysterious sounds, what David Chapin called "anti-spiritists" (Chapin 2004: 93). For the results of the first investigations at Corinthian Hall, Rochester, in November 1849, did not convince skeptics of the supernatural nature of these mysterious phenomena.

The first major anti-Spiritist was Stanley Grimes, a well-known lecturer on mesmerism and phrenology at the time. Curiously, he believed in mesmerism<sup>2</sup> and phrenology<sup>3</sup>, but he did not believe

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<sup>2</sup> A practice developed by an Austrian, Franz Anton Mesmer, in the eighteenth century. In the 1840s, it was already popular in England and the United States. Mesmerism involved putting the subject into a state of trance, which was called mesmerization. Mesmerized subjects were very susceptible to suggestion and could be led to believe in almost everything the hypnotist suggested. In practice, mesmerism was often used to relieve pain, but then branched out to encompass beliefs and phenomena such as clairvoyance, the mind's ability to leave the body to communicate with the minds of others, or even to see things at a distance.

<sup>3</sup> From the Greek φρήν (*phrēn*-mind) and λόγος (*logos*-study), literally: study of the mind. A theory that claimed to be able to

in Spiritism. At first, he came to believe that the Fox sisters were clairvoyant, but after further investigations, he came to conclusion that they were cunning frauds. He claimed to have extracted a confession from a woman in upstate New York who learned his tricks from the Fox sisters. Grimes did not pretend to have figured out exactly how the sisters deceived people, but he provided a skeptical account of the way they are calculated to avoid any rigorous investigation". He used phrenology to explain both things: the credulity of a believer, the shape of the head indicated that it was well suited for the accommodation of superstitious ideas; and the cunning of Leah Fish, whose head shape indicated "courage, cunning, skepticism, and ready practical skill" (Chapin, 2004: 93). Because of Grimes' ability to mesmerize others, the woman's confession was not believed by all, since she may have confessed under the effect of mesmerization.

Another anti-spiritist of that time was C. Chauncey Burr, the editor of the magazine *Nineteenth Century Review*. He lectured on the theme "Imagination and Vision of Ghosts", in which he demonstrated the susceptibility of the human mind to the suggestions of hypnotic powers. From the outset, Burr believed the thumping sounds were frauds, but he was not so interested in them until he noticed the growing number of people believing in the authenticity of those tricks. He then went on to

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explain a person's personality and character by the shape of the head. It was developed by the German physician Franz Joseph Gall, around the year 1800 and became popular in the eighteenth century. Today, this theory is unanimously recognized as a pseudoscience by scientists.



visit mediums and investigate his demonstrations. Shortly thereafter, he discovered that he was able to reproduce the rappings very loudly by popping the joint of the big toe and explained the medium's ability to influence the participants through the study of the imagination. In January 1851, he presented lectures "Unmasked Spiritual Sounds" for three days in New York City. Burr showed how he could produce the kicking sounds with the big toe, loud enough for everyone to hear, while his brother demonstrated his ability to control the imagination and the will of the audience with randomly chosen spectators. Fox's supporter in New York, Horace Greeley, attended the talks, but was not convinced that the fraud was proven. Burr continued to spread his anti-Spiritist message through his agenda of lectures, though unable to convince those who believed in thrashing sounds as a way to change their minds (Chapin, 2004: 94).

Soon thereafter, a more thorough investigation, or rather the most thorough of all of which we have records, was carried out by three physicians at the University of Buffalo, a city in the far west of New York state, USA. These doctors were: Dr. C. B. Coventry, Dr. Charles A. Lee and Dr. T. M. Foote, who became known as "The Buffalo Doctors". They initially watched the Fox sisters' demonstrations at Phelps House in New York City and in February 1851 published a joint paper on the results of their crash sounds studies in the following local newspapers: the Buffalo Commercial Advertiser and the Buffalo Medical Journal. Briefly, they concluded that the mysterious sounds produced by the sisters were frauds and that "sounds should come from the action of the will,

through the voluntary muscles on the joints". They found that the knee joint was most likely and claimed to have found a highly respectable woman in Buffalo who was able to produce such sounds with her knee (Chapin, 2004: 95).<sup>4</sup>

Upon learning of this publication, Leah Fox immediately challenged the doctors to prove the truth of this theory through a private investigation, a challenge that the doctors accepted. Later, at a meeting in Buffalo, investigations were conducted as follows. The sisters sat on a sofa, and then the sounds began and continued for some time in high tones and in rapid succession. Some questions were asked to the spirits, who responded through the blowing sounds. Then a first controlled experiment was done, sitting the sisters in two chairs, with their heels on cushions, legs stretched out with their toes up and feet separated from each other. The goal was to find out if sounds were produced by the feet. The group of participants sat in a semicircle and waited for the thumping sounds to sound for more than half an hour, but the spirits, generally very noisy, remained mute. As they resumed their previous position on the couch, their feet touching the floor, the thumping sounds soon resurfaced.

Then another experiment was suggested that it be done. The knees of the two sisters were firmly secured, so that any movement of the muscles or bones could be perceived. The purpose was to know if the popping of the knees produced

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<sup>4</sup> A very different account of the results of these investigations was made by Arthur Conan Doyle: "The investigation was carried out, but the results were negative" (Doyle, 1926: 83).

the sounds. The hands of the experimenter were held in position, holding the knees, for several minutes, and then repeated often for a duration of an hour or more with negative results, i.e., many sounds happened when the knees were not held and none when the hands were holding their knees except once. When the pressure was intentionally relaxed, two or three knock sounds were vaguely heard. Dr. Lee, who held the knees, found that the movement of the bone was clearly perceptible to him. The experience of holding the knees, as quickly as possible, when the sounds first began, was tested several times, but always with the result of putting an immediate interruption in the manifestations of the sounds.

To the doctors, then, the conclusion seemed clear that the Rochester sisters' blows emanated from the knee joint. To this the doctors added that, since when this revelation was published, we have heard about several cases in which the movements of the bones, entering other joints, are produced by muscular effort, giving rise to the emission of sounds. We have heard of a person who is capable of developing sounds of the ankle, of various people who can produce sounds with the joints of the fingers or toes, one that can produce sounds of the shoulder and one of the hips. We have also heard of two cases in which sounds are produced by the knee joint (Podmore, 2011: vol.I, 184-5).

The curious thing about these experiments above is that their results are the most coincidental, about the way the tricks were performed, with the revelations in Mrs. Norman Culver's confessions in April 1851 (Carpenter, 2011:

150-2) and Fox sisters, in October 1888 (Davenport, 1897). For example, in Mrs. Norman Culver's confession, she mentioned that Maggie Fox once told her "that when people insisted on seeing their feet and fingers, she could produce a few sounds with her knee" (Carpenter, 2011: 151 and Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 186).

Unexpectedly, the publications of the results of these scientific investigations on the fraudulent nature of the sounds of the spirits have drawn more curiosity from the public to know more about this new phenomenon than the feeling of indignation at the disclosure of the fraud. Leah Fox Underhill even stated that, in the end, the Buffalo trials were a victory for Spiritism (Sawin, 2008: 113). Dr. Lee, disappointed by the fact that the Fox sisters were getting even more supporters, even after the revelations of the fraud, decided to take a different strategy. He found a man who could snap his ankles and thus give "a more striking illustration to the blowing sounds". He began touring in upstate New York, demonstrating that the sounds had a logical explanation, with that man snapping at his ankles. To his surprise and disgust, he discovered that several people in the audience were converting to the doctrine of Spiritism, and what was even worse, they mentioned their demonstrations of fraud as the strongest argument for their conversions. Later he wrote that he was shocked and horrified by the results and "abandoned the project and asked his assistant to no longer produce the sounds" (Sawin, 2008: 113). In short, the more the frauds were demonstrated, the more the Spiritist Movement grew, that is, the shot was backfiring.

In 1887, a report was published on some demonstrations of blowing sounds by Seybert Commission of the University of Pennsylvania. Although the commission members had unmasked some other frauds, they were not able to unmask Maggie Fox, but this was mainly because she simply avoided producing the knock sounds when the investigation was too close. The report of this investigation was published in the Preliminary Report of the Commission in 1887 (Chapin: 2004: 213 and 248n51).<sup>5</sup>

Frank Podmore evaluated the failure of the results in Buffalo as follow: "It seems clear ... that the demonstrations in Buffalo did not reach the desired goals, in that they failed to give a full explanation to the case. It is probable that sounds were produced by various methods, and that, where conditions made one medium impractical, another was employed. It would be a poor medium who would not be able to employ a variety of means to produce its effects". He then cited the anti-spiritist Chauney Burr, who prided himself on his knowledge of no less than seventeen methods of producing the knock sounds (Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 189). Spiritists most frequent refusal to believe in the scientific unmasking of frauds was that they demonstrated fraud, but did not explain the correct

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Kurtz and Harry Houdini mentioned an investigation in June 1857 by three professors of a Harvard University Committee on the Fox sisters, but it was not possible to locate the publication of the research report (Kurtz, 1985: 181 and Houdini, 2011: 09).

nature of the spirits' responses during the sessions, so those demonstrations of fraud were not a complete contestation.

### **The Confession of Norman Culver**

The Fox sisters were still celebrating their success in Buffalo when a new coup hit them, this time more closely, that is, coming from the sister-in-law of the only brother of the Fox sisters, David Fox. Known by Mrs. Norman Culver, who decided to confess the frauds she learned from the Fox sisters (through testimony published in the *New York Herald*, April 17, 1851)<sup>6</sup>, after a season assisting them in the execution of the fraudulent phenomena. She claimed that for two years she believed the knock sounds to be genuine, but after noticing some suspicious circumstances, she offered herself to Katie (Catherine Fox) to assist her. Maggie (Margaret Fox) being absent, Katie accepted the offer, for Mrs. Culver was a very trustworthy person, and revealed to her that the sounds were produced by the knees and toes, but especially by the latter. That some practice was necessary and if the feet were completely heated, the sounds would happen more quickly. Mrs. Culver tried and was soon accepted (Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 186 and Carpenter, 2011: 150-2).

As for the Spiritist believers' argument that scientific investigations were not able to account for the correct answers to the spirits, Mrs. Culver confessed how Katie (Catherine Fox) told her how

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<sup>6</sup> The complete confession is reproduced in Carpenter, 2011: 150-2.

she could answer the questions. "She said that it was usually easier to answer correctly if the questioner wrote several names on a piece of paper and then pointed them at them (the names on paper) until the spirit rang in the correct name, this was to give them (Fox sisters) the chance to examine the physiognomy and movements of the person (who asked), and that, in this way, they could almost always guess correctly" (Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 186; see also: Capron, 1855: 421-2 and Carpenter, 2011: 150-2). She (Katie) also revealed how they (the sisters) held and moved the tables (Mrs. Culver gave a demonstration of the tricks). Mrs. Culver also revealed the following trick: "She (Kate Fox) said that when my cousin consulted the spirit, I should sit next to her and touch her arm when the right letter is requested. I did so and was able to answer almost every question correctly "(Capron, 1855: 421 and Carpenter, 2011: 150).

As for the Spirits' argument that the scrawny sounds produced by the toes, the knee, or the ankle did not explain how sounds happened on walls, furniture, and the ceiling, Mrs. Culver revealed how this trick was done. "She also told me that all I should do to make the knock sounds heard on the table would be to put my foot down the table when I made the sound, and when I wanted to make the sounds sound far away on a wall, I should make them louder, and direct my eyes seriously to the place where I wanted them to be heard. She said that if I could put my foot against the base of the door, the sounds would be heard at the top of the door "(Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 186 and Carpenter, 2011: 150-2).

Mrs. Culver added that she was informed by Kate that her niece Elizabeth Fish (nicknamed Lizzie, daughter of Leah's first marriage because she married three times) "accidentally figured out how to produce the knock sounds by playing with her fingers of his foot against the wood of his bed. Many little mischievous girls before and since seem to have made the same discovery" (Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 186). It seems that other family members and relatives were also suspicious or aware of the fraud. For example, Maggie's husband (later Margaret Fox Kane), Elisha Kent Kane, an important explorer of the time, never became a spiritist and always publicly asserted that the whole thing was cheating (Sawin, 2008: 113).

After this confession appeared in the newspapers, the Fox sisters simply denied the allegations, claiming that Mrs. Culver was only a distant relative and that she resented the Fox family (Chapin, 2004: 96), for a few decades later, to confirm almost everything that was revealed by Mrs. Culver in the confessions of 1888. Finally, the confession of Mrs. Norman Culver anticipated, in part, the confessions of the Fox sisters.

This confession is contested by Arthur C. Doyle<sup>7</sup> and Eliab W. Capron, on the grounds that when Catherine Fox (Kate) made the confession to Mrs. Culver, she was residing in Mr. Capron's house, seventy miles away (Doyle, 1926: 83). However, from what is revealed in the confession, Mrs. Culver lived with the Fox family for a long time,

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<sup>7</sup> The well-known novelist and creator of the Sherlock Holmes character series, he was a fervent spiritist, wrote *The History of Spiritualism*, published in 1926.



since it was related, so the exact date of the revelation of the tricks for Mrs. Culver was not specified. The date of the revelations of the tricks was different from the date of the confession, since, according to the historians' account, the Fox sisters resided in different residences after the first phenomena occurred in Hydesville.

### **The Confessions of the Two Youngest Fox Sisters**

The first thing that must be analyzed in the confessions (1888) is the degree of credibility of them. This doubt divided and continues to divide the authors into those who believe in the veracity of their content (Davenport, 1897, Mann, 1919, Houdini, 1924 and Kurtz, 1985), those who despise them (Doyle 1926 and Buckland 2005) and who that attributes to them only relative importance (Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 187)<sup>8</sup>. This latter judged, in particular, on the fact that the two younger sisters recanted the confessions in the following year (1889), that is, they denied all that was said in the confessions of 1888, as we will see later.

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Podmore summed up the credibility of the Fox sisters' confessions: "In the absence of evidence, the later confessions of the two younger Fox sisters, though not conclusive, are at least pertinent," and summed up confessions in just a short paragraph (Podmore, 2011: vol.1, 187-8). While Paul Kurtz, on the contrary, exaggerated the importance of confessions: "... the most severe blow that Spiritism has ever been reached is known today through the solemn declarations of the world's greatest medium that everything is a fraud, a deception and a lie "(Kurtz, 1985: 225).

The motives that led the sisters to confess to fraud are controversial. Of course, the spiritists and the skeptics, each side presents its version. By the time of the confession, Maggie Fox, then Margaret Fox Kane, had already abandoned her Spiritist sessions<sup>9</sup>, she had converted to Catholicism in 1858, was poor and engrossed in alcoholism<sup>10</sup>. She was away and almost forgotten in the Spiritist Movement and widow of Elisha Kent Kane, who died in the city of Havana during an expedition to the Caribbean on February 16, 1857<sup>11</sup>. While Kate, then Catherine Fox Jencken, was residing in London, as she married a lawyer in London in 1872 (Henry Diedrich Jencken), was widowed in 1881, had also sunk in alcoholism. She was engaged in a quarrel with her older sister, Leah Underhill, for the custody of her children, since the latter alleged that Kate was no longer able to care for her children in her irresponsibility with her children. So that she was denounced to the *Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children*<sup>12</sup> and she was arrested in the winter of 1888. Annoyed by her

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<sup>9</sup> It appears that his last Spiritist session was for President Franklin Pierce's wife (1853-1857), Jane Appleton Pierce, whose eleven-year-old son (Benjamin Pierce) had recently died in a horrific train crash in 1853 ( Sawin, 2008: 113).

<sup>10</sup> Maggie Fox Kane revealed the following in her confession: "As I used to say to those who wanted me to perform séance, 'you are taking me to hell.' Then the next day I would sink my remorse into wine "(Davenport, 1897: 36 and Houdini, 2011: 10).

<sup>11</sup> The marriage lasted only about six years, 1852-1858.

<sup>12</sup> Leah Fox Underhill considered Kate an incapable mother, so she was part of a widely publicized attempt by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to remove Kate's children.

older sister, she joined her sister Maggie in the confessions.

All these problems generated dissatisfaction in the minds of the two younger sisters. The climax happened in 1888. Kate had returned from England, after her husband's death, she and Maggie, both had become strange and unpredictable. As well as becoming compulsive alcoholics and they were disturbed. A New York Herald reporter described Maggie Fox's mental state when he met her at her home in New York City. "He described her as a small, charismatic middle-aged woman whose face showed the traces of much sadness and vast experience. Her behavior was erratic. She walked the floor and periodically burst into tears in front of the reporter, when she told him of her plans to reveal the fraud. At times, she would suddenly sit on the piano and discharge intermittent disorderly and incoherent manifestations of melody" (Chapin, 2004: 214). In the above report, the signs of alcoholic dementia<sup>13</sup> and senile dementia<sup>14</sup> of Maggie Fox, at the age of 55 are clear.

She left New York in March 1888 for London when she learned from the New York Herald about the conflict between Leah and her sister Kate and Kate's efforts to keep the custody of

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<sup>13</sup> A form of dementia caused by excessive alcohol consumption, it affects memory, learning and other mental functions. Excessive alcohol consumption can have a harmful effect on nerve cells in the brain. When these are damaged, various capacities and skills are impaired.

<sup>14</sup> Dementia proper of old age, but that in some individuals happens before the arrival of old age.

the children. She used this occasion to vent her dissatisfaction, in a letter to the New York Herald, attributing all her problems and her family to Spiritism. "Spiritism is a curse. No matter what form Spiritism presents itself, it is, was and always will be a curse and a trap for all who engage with it", she declared on May 27, 1888, in New York Herald (Chapin, 2004: 214).

However, Maggie Fox's words were no longer as effective as before, her prestige within and outside the Spiritist Movement was declining. She had become an almost forgotten character, only enjoyed the attention of the newspapers for being one of the founders of the Modern Spiritist Movement. As the Spiritist adherents, many perceived in their outburst the influence of their Catholic conversion.

The plan to confess to fraud was taken forward by the sisters on October 21, 1888, in the auditorium of the Academy of Music in New York, promising to the tabloids the "death of Spiritism." A large and diverse audience attended the event. Before Maggie's address, anti-Spiritist Dr. Cassius M. Richmond, a dentist who was known to reveal frauds, stepped onto the stage and gave a speech in which he stated, "the age of miracles is over". Kate Fox was there, sitting in the auditorium in silent affirmation of her sister's actions. Finally, Maggie took the stage, "a small woman with black eyes, dark hair, black dress, wearing glasses with a black chain and a large ring". She was obviously frightened and looked so pathetic that some in the audience began to disturb her. She read her testimony that Spiritism was a fraud and then sat down, put her feet on a board and held a display of

how she performed the rappings with her toes in an auditorium crowded.

Maggie's confession did not have that much effect, as many had already considered her mentally unbalanced and addicted to alcohol. At the time of this confession, in 1888, Spiritism had already settled so firmly in the minds of believing adherents that many felt the thumping sounds were not frauds, but the confessions of the Fox sisters were frauds. The soon-to-be-published book, bringing together all of the sisters' confessions, Reuben Briggs Davenport's *The Death-blow to Spiritualism*, which hoped to end Spiritism altogether, was ignored by most Spiritists more dedicated. Finally, the sisters Maggi and Kate Fox enjoyed very little success as anti-spiritists when compared to success as mediums, even having made a tour around the country for a while, this time revealing the frauds. It seems that the majority of the public, at that time, preferred to be enchanted by the tricks than to know the way they were executed. This may explain why magicians still provide so much attraction these days, even the public knowing that magic is a trick.

Those who have known the success of the two younger Fox sisters in glory days will be horrified to know the sad ending of their lives. Just before her passing, Maggie Fox was impoverished, lonely and living in charity as well as prematurely aged. The New York Times reported that Maggie Fox was about to be evicted from her home in New York (New York Times, March 5, 1893). She was then taken away by a spiritualist sympathizer, Mrs. Emily B. Ruggles, only to die a few days later on March 8, 1893, at the age of 59 (New York Times,

March 10, 1893). The Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph reported: "Her once handsome face was at the end marked by age and decline, and his only appetite was for alcoholic drink" (Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph, March 9, 1893 - Chapin, 2004: 216). The few spiritists who still met Maggie organized the funeral. The ceremony was presided over by the spirit of the late Benjamin Franklin, who spoke through medium Charles Hicks in a trance. It was also reported that the funeral was attended by the spirits of older sister Ann Leah Underhill and Horace Greeley, who had died a few years ago (New York Times, March 11, 1893 - Chapin, 2004: 216). His younger sister, Kate Fox, had been dead since July 3, 1892.

### **The Recantation**

Just as the spiritist authors despised confessions and the skeptical authors emphasized them, with the 1889 recantation, the opposite occurred, that is, the spiritist authors valued it, and the skeptics ignored it. The motives that led the Fox sisters to recant, that is, to deny their confessions, are a polemic among the authors. Some Spiritist authors (Doyle, 1926: 103 and Buckland, 2005: 153) claimed that Maggie received money to make the confession. In the words of Arthur C. Doyle: "She (Maggie) should receive a sum of money for the sensation of the newspaper she had promised to produce" (Doyle, 1926: 103). It is not improbable that Maggie's precarious financial situation may have motivated her to make the sensational confession with lectures and demonstration of fraud

in a large auditorium, since anyone who accepted money to deceive the public with fraudulent phenomena will not also be embarrassed to receive money for reveal the tricks, even more in need. The same author further alleged that Maggie considered that the amount was small and then decided to do the recantation (idem: 106), in an interview for the New York Press in November of 1889. She began the interview repenting in the following way: "I wish God could undo the injustice I did to the cause of Spiritism when, under the strong psychological influence of his enemies (of Spiritism), I uttered words that did not had foundation in the truth "(Doyle, 1926: 106). Being that, the previous year, in her confession, Maggie had declared, "Spiritism is a farce from beginning to end. It is the greatest farce of the century "(Davenport, 1897: 57).

## **Final Considerations**

The spirits 'most frequent justification for the Fox sisters' misfortune is that, since the phenomena happened at the beginning of the Modern Spiritist Movement, it was not surprising that evil spirits who disgraced their lives because the first mediums still could not distinguish the good from the evil spirits accidentally involved the sisters. But this is a justification that only fulfills the need of the spiritist believer, with no historical foundation, for it is first necessary to believe in the existence of spirits and then, what is even more doubtful, in the communication with them, hypotheses that are not yet duly substantiated. Also, despite the examples

of fraud, Leah Fox's bad character with her financial appetite, the results of the investigations that pointed out the frauds, the confessions, the many individuals who developed the same capacity to produce the sounds of rappings with the with the knee or ankle, without even presenting themselves as mediums, of the disorders that led to alcoholism, of the Spiritist Movement's departure, of Maggie Fox's conversion to Catholicism in 1858, of Kate Fox's irresponsibility in the care of children between the two children that resulted in her arrest, the quarrel between Leah and Kate Fox for the custody of the latter's children, premature dementia, the mental confusion of the two younger sisters in confessing to the frauds the next year to recant them, the end of life in the poverty, etc. Nevertheless, some Spiritist writers still admire the Fox sisters, divulging them as true mediums and pioneers of the Modern Spiritist Movement (an example: Buckland, 2005: 148-53), extracting their information only on the basis of Spiritist historians (an example: Doyle, 1926), who value the data extolling the Fox sisters and devalue those who frame them.

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